

NCR SAFETY & HEALTH NEWSLETTER

March 1999

ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

This newsletter is designed as an overview of the U.S. General Services Administration's (GSA) program to protect you from asbestos-related hazards. One of GSA's missions is to provide a safe and healthy environment for Federal employees.

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos, which is common in our environment, is a mineral found in certain kinds of rock formations. The ore containing this mineral is processed and used in a wide variety of products. Asbestos makes an excellent insulation material and is heat, fire, and corrosion resistant.

But using asbestos-containing products is potentially hazardous. If the thin, very light asbestos fibers are disturbed and become airborne, people can inhale them. Prolonged exposure to loose fibers at high concentrations can cause lung damage.

Workers previously involved in asbestos production and manufacturing have the highest risk of developing asbestos-related diseases. Smoking further increases the risk of developing lung cancer. Workers in typical office situations are not expected to develop asbestos-related diseases.

Surveys and Inspections

GSA has surveyed each of the more than 7,000 buildings in the inventory nationwide, for asbestos and asbestos-containing materials. Those initial surveys are supplemented by periodic reinspections to check the asbestos for deterioration.

Many buildings do not contain asbestos, but for those GSA-controlled buildings that do, GSA has initiated a program to protect the people in the building and the building's environment. This is our Asbestos Management and Control Program, explained in this newsletter.

GSA also inspects new additions to its building inventory for asbestos, checks space to be renovated for asbestos disturbance, and requires lessors to report on asbestos in their buildings.

Three Categories of Material with Asbestos

There are three main categories of material containing asbestos that might be found in a typical office building:

Surfacing Material. Asbestos may be part of the material sprayed or troweled onto certain surfaces, such as fireproofing that is applied to beams or used as decorative acoustical treatment.

Thermal System Insulation. Substances containing asbestos may have been used on pipes, boilers, water tanks, and ducts.

Miscellaneous Material. Asbestos might be found in other miscellaneous materials - floor or ceiling tiles, or in siding or roofing materials.

Leave Asbestos In or Take It Out?

But just because there are asbestos-containing materials in a building does not mean there's a health threat. Properly handled, these materials can remain in place for years. In fact, because improper removal can create a hazard where one didn't exist before, the Environmental Protection Agency states that it's often wiser and safer not to remove these materials but to manage them in place.

But, whatever form it's in, if there's asbestos in a GSA-controlled building, GSA follows Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. These guidelines require a comprehensive asbestos management program to protect employees, visitors, and the building's environment.

GSA Asbestos Management and Control Program

The first step in this program is designating an asbestos program manager, someone who is responsible for:

- Overseeing GSA's asbestos management and control program in a building;
- Ensuring that asbestos-containing materials are not accidentally disturbed;
- Ensuring that if these materials are intentionally disturbed - during repairs or renovation - that proper safeguards are followed by the people doing the work; and
- Providing the required protection for Federal employees in the building.

The main components of the program are:

Inspection and Assessment to identify the locations and condition of asbestos-containing materials.

Operations and Maintenance to manage asbestos in place and keep it in good condition.

Abatement to seal off or remove asbestos-containing materials when necessary.

Inspection and Assessment

The asbestos program manager oversees the careful inspection of the building by a trained, qualified person to find the location and condition of asbestos-containing materials. GSA also reinspects the asbestos to update the reports.

Operations and Maintenance

There are eight major elements in an effective Operations and Maintenance program.

Notification. All agencies in GSA-controlled space with asbestos-containing materials are informed of the location and condition of asbestos materials in the building.

This is especially important if any construction or renovation projects involving asbestos are planned or underway. Through notification, GSA helps prevent accidental disturbance of the material and therefore helps keep building tenants safe.

Surveillance. Periodic reinspections, supplemented by air monitoring, ensure that damaged or deteriorating asbestos is detected quickly and that corrective actions are taken.

Administrative Controls. These ensure that all asbestos-related work is properly performed and monitored, and that agency employees report any unusual conditions, and do not disturb asbestos themselves.

Work Practices. Maintenance workers are protected from potential hazards in their jobs. This includes making certain that no one inadvertently disturbs asbestos-containing material and using special procedures to prevent the accidental release of asbestos.

Worker Protection. Workers whose jobs include the *intentional* handling of asbestos-containing materials are equipped with approved respiratory protection and protective clothing, undergo medical checkups, and receive training.

Training. Anyone involved with asbestos-containing materials receives appropriate training. This includes:

- *Awareness Training* for custodians and anyone else involved in cleaning or in simple maintenance jobs. Such a person doesn't directly handle asbestos-containing materials but might need to report an accidental disturbance to his or her supervisor.
- *Operations and Maintenance Training* for workers who perform incidental repairs on asbestos-containing materials.
- *Abatement Worker Training* for workers who are directly involved in sealing off, repairing on a large scale, or removing asbestos.
- *Specialized Training* for asbestos program managers, buildings management staff, project management staff, or others involved in designing, performing, or inspecting asbestos-related activities.

Waste Disposal. All asbestos-containing wastes are stored, transported, and disposed of in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Transportation regulations.

Recordkeeping. All documents on location, type, management, and removal of asbestos are kept in permanent files for an indefinite period of time.

Abatement

If asbestos-containing materials within a building deteriorate, or if planned renovations would disturb asbestos materials, an abatement strategy may be necessary for treating or removing these materials. This could be:

Encapsulating the asbestos materials by coating them with a sealant.

Enclosing the materials inside an airtight barrier.

Repairing or removing the asbestos materials.

Safeguards are strictly enforced anytime asbestos abatement work is done in a building. These rigorous safeguards, designed to protect employees and visitors, include frequent inspections of work areas and surrounding spaces; air monitoring; and restricting work-area access only to authorized workers and visitors.

Employees should notify their supervisors if questions or problems arise.

GSA's Safety and Health Programs

GSA is concerned about the health and safety of federal employees and other building occupants. All of the careful procedures explained in this newsletter - the inspections, the training, the strict procedural controls - are designed to minimize potential asbestos hazards in any GSA-controlled building.

We encourage you to make comments and ask questions about GSA's Asbestos Management and Control Program - or any other safety and health programs. For more information on these programs, contact your agency's Facility Management Official or Safety Officer. The GSA Safety and Environment office listed below can provide technical assistance to your agency's officials.

GSA's Safety, Environment and Fire Protection Regional Office

National Capital Region

Room 2080
7th & D Streets, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20407
(202) 708-5236

For additional information, you also may contact the following federal agencies:

Environmental Protection Agency

Washington, DC
(202) 554-1404

Department of Labor

Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Office of Health Compliance
Washington, D.C.
(202) 523-8036

INTERNET Addresses

Information concerning asbestos and other safety and health related topics can be found on the **INTERNET** at the following **Federal Government World Wide Web Sites (www)**:

<http://www.cdc.gov>
<http://www.epa.gov>
<http://www.gsa.gov>
<http://www.osha.gov>
<http://www.dot.gov>

Centers for Disease Control
Environmental Protection Agency
General Services Administration
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
Department of Transportation